

Message Text

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DODE-00 H-01 NSC-05 ERDA-05 IO-13 OMB-01 NEA-10
EB-08 /108 W

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R 011533Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5162
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
USMISSION USNATO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 17426

USEEC

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: UR, IT, PARM, NATO, EC
SUBJECT: ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS TURNED OFF BY SOVIETS

SUMMARY: SOVIET HOSTS TO VISITING ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS, INCLUDING GROMYKO (WHO APPEARED PHYSICALLY FIT), WRE VERY HARD, CRITICAL, EVEN HARSH, IN ATTEMPTING TO PRESSURE ITALIANS INTO SHIFTING POSTITIONS ON DISARMAMENT ISSUES, ESPECIALLY NEUTRON BOMB. PONOMAREV ALSO CRITICIZED ITALIAN MEMBERSHIP IN "AGRES-SIVE" NATO. SOVIETS WERE SO HAM-HANDED THAT ITALIAN DELEGATES (WHO INCLUDED SOME SOPHISTICATED MEN, E.G., THREE FORMER UN-DERSECRETARIES FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AS WELL AS TWO COMMUNISTS, A MAOIST, AND A NEO-FASCIST) REACTED STRONGLY, DUG IN THEIR HEELS IN AND REDUCED FIVE-PAGE SOVIET DRAFT TO ONE PAGE COMMUNIQUE WHICH NOTES DISCUSSIONS WERE "FRANK". SOME INTERESTING PCI AS-PECTS ARE REPORTED SEPTEL. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE ITALIAN POLITICAL COUNSELOR GAVE US A READOUT OF THE NOVEMBER 21-28 VISIT OF 10 MEMBERS OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMISSION OF THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT LED BY CARLO RUSSO. THEY WERE HOSTED BY HARD-LINE SOVIET IDEOLOGUE, BORIS PONOMAREV, WHO HEADS THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMISSION OF THE SOVIET NATION-ALITIES OF THE SUPREME SOVIET (AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, IS A CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER AND CC SECRETARY). THE ITALIANS

WERE ALSO RECEIVED BY GROMYKO. THE SOVIETS RIGIDLY REPEATED THE STANDARD LINE ON ALL ISSUES, GROMYKO BEING A BIT MORE DIPLOMATIC IN HIS PRESENTATIONS. DESPITE TV AND PRESS COVERAGE WHICH GAVE A POSITIVE CAST TO THE MEETINGS, THE SESSIONS DID NOT GO SMOOTHLY, WE ARE TOLD. ITALIAN POLCOUNS DESCRIBED TALKS AS TWO MONOLOGUES RATHER THAN A DIALOGUE. FOLLOWING ARE MAIN POINTS.

2. DISARMAMENT: THIS WAS CHIEF TOPIC ON SOVIET SIDE WITH EXCHANGES BECOMING HEATED AT TIMES, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE. THE SOVIETS RAN THROUGH THE ENTIRE LIST OF SOVIET DISARMAMENT PROPOSALS, PARTICULARLY THE PROPOSALS FOR NON-FIRST USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND FREEZE ON MEMBERS IN NATO AND WP. IN THIS CONTEXT THE SOVIETS ACCUSED NATO OF OBSTRUCTING DISARMAMENT AND OF BEING MAJOR PROMOTER OF THE ARMS RACE BY DEVELOPING NEW WEAPONS SYSTEMS. THE NEUTRON BOMB WAS CITED REPEATEDLY AND EMPHATICALLY AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE NEW WEAPONS BY WHICH THE "AGGRESSIVE NATO ALLIANCE WAS THREATENING THE SECURITY AND MILITARY STABILITY OF EUROPE.

3. THE ITALIAN PARTICIPATION IN NATO: THE SOVIETS ARGUED FOR ITALIAN "MODERATION" OF ITS PARTICIPATION IN NATO AND OF ITS SUPPORT OF NATO POLICIES. THE SOVIETS CLAIM THAT SINCE NATO IS AN "AGGRESSIVE BLOC" THAT IT WAS UP TO THE ITALIANS TO PROVIDE A "MODERATING INFLUENCE" IN NATO. ADDITIONALLY, THE ITALIANS WERE URGED TO LESSEN THEIR MILITARY EXPENDITURES SINCE THIS WUOD BE A "POSITIVE" STEP TOWARD LESSENING TENSIONS IN EUROPE
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AND WOULD HAVE THE ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF ASSISTING ITALY IN OVERCOMING THE "DEVASTATING" SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC "CRISIS" IN WHICH IT FOUND ITSELF.

4. THE MIDDLE EAST: THE MOST EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION OF THE MIDDLE EAST OCCURRED IN THE MEETING WITH GROMYKO DURING WHICH HE STRONGLY CRITICIZED THE SADAT TRIP TO JERUSALEM AND CLAIMED THAT IT MADE THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS MORE DIFFICULT AND WORSENERD THE CHANCES OF QUICKLY RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. NONETHELESS, GROMYKO AND THE OTHER SOVIETS URGED STRONGLY THAT THE MEPC BE RECONVENED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

5. THE EC-9: THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS WERE SURPRISED TO HEAR NOTHING BUT NEGATIVE REMARKS FROM THEIR SOVIET HOSTS ON THE QUESTION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES. THE SOVIETS EXPRESSED THEMSELVES ONLY IN VAGUE TERMS BUT EVIDENCED VERY STRONG SUSPICIONS THAT THE INTEGRATION PROCESS WAS CONTRARY TO SOVIET INTERESTS AND WOULD CAUSE PROBLEMS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SIVIET UNION AND THE WEST EUROPEAN MEMBER STATES. IN RESPONSE THE ITALIANS CHIDED THE SOVIETS FOR THEIR FAILURE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE REALITY OF THE INTEGRATION MOVEMENT AND CONTRASTED "SOVIET PREJUDICES" WITH THE WELL-DEFINED AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE

TOWARDS THE EC-9 IN THE U.S. AND CHINA.

6. COMMUNIQUE: THE ITALIANS WERE AGHAST AT THE FIVE PAGE DRAFT THE SOVIETS PRESENTED THEM (WE HAVE PARTIAL TEXT WHICH WE ARE POUCHING TO DEPARTMENT) AND REDUCED IT TO ONE PAGE, CHARACTERIZING THE DISCUSSIONS AS "FRANK."

7. SOME VIGNETTES:

-- APPROACHING KREMLIN BANQUET TABLE, V.P. RUBEN, CHAIRMAN

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OF THE SOVIET OF NATIONALITIES OF THE SUPREME SOVIET, TURNED TO A..M. SHITIKOV, CHAIRMAN OF THE SOVIET OF THE UNION OF THE SUPREME SOVIET. AND ASKED "HOW CAN WE SIT AT THE SAME TABLE WITH THAT NEO-FASCIST?" THEIR APPREHENSIONS WERE FULFILLED, FOR THE ITALIAN NEO-FASCIST DEMANDED INFORMATION AND ACCESS TO GRAVES OF ITALIANS WHO FELL ON WWII EASTERN FRONT. PONOMAREV ANGRILY PROTESTED THAT IT MADE HIS "BLOOD BOIL" TO HEAR CONCERN EXPRESSED OVER FASCISTS' FATE. THE NEO-FASCIST REPLIED THAT SOLDIERS ARE SOLDIERS, THEY FOLLOW ORDERS FROM THEIR GOVERNMENT AND THAT HE HAD A RIGHT TO SEE THESE GRAVES. HE ALSO TOLD HIS HOSTS THAT IF THEY WERE SERIOUS ABOUT DETENTE THEY WOULD SHOW IT BY TEARING DOWN THE BERLIN WALL.

-- SOVIETS BRAZENLY INCLUDE WREATH-LAYING AT LENIN MAUSOLEUM IN DRAFT PROGRAM (AS THEY HAD ALSO TRIED TO DO FOR CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER'S TRIP). ITALIAN AMBASSADOR VACILLATED. OUR SOURCE SOUGHT U.S. ADVICE. POL COUNSELOR SAID IT WAS UNTHINK-CONFIDENTIAL

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ABLE FOR A U.S. OFFICIAL DELEGATION. OUR SOURCE THEN SPOKE WITH INDIVIDUAL ITALIAN DELEGATES AND PRODUCED A CONSENSUS FOR WREATH-LAYING AT GRAVE OF UNKNOWN SOLDIER BUT AGAINST MAUSOLEUM OPTION. SOVIETS PERRRSISTENTLY TRIED TO TURN THEM AROUND, OFFERING PAY FOR THE WREATH, EVEN OFFERING TO LAY WREATH AT MAUSOLEUM THEMSELES "ON BEHALF" OF ITALIANS, WHO REFUSED.

8. ITALIAN IMPRESSIONS: THE PARLIAMENTARIANS WERE IMPRESSED BY THE INSISTENCE OF THE SOVIETS ON THE DISARMAMENT, NEUTRON BOMB AND NATO ISSUES AND WERE SOMEWHAT TAKEN ABACK BY THE HARSH TONE, PARTICULARLY OF PONOMAREV. THEY SPECULATED THAT THE SOVIETS HAD TAKEN THIS LINE BECAUSE THEY FEEL THAT ITALY, WHICH SOURCE DESCRIBED AS ONE OF THE SMALLER COUNTRIES IN NATO", MIGHT BE INFLUENCED BY SOVIET PRESSURE TO LESSEN THEIR ACTIVITY AND SUPPORT OF THE ALLIANCE. THEY ALSO FELT THAT THE SOVIET ATTITUDE REFLECTED A CERTAIN PREOCCUPATION WITH THE ARMS RACE AND A TACIT RECOGNITION OF THEIR ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL WEAKNESS VIS-AVIS THE NATO COUNTRIES WHEN IT COMES TO ARMS DEVELOPMENT. FINALLY THEY THOUGHT THAT THE HARSHNESS OF THE SOVIET PRESENTATION ON ALL SUBJECTS MIGHT REFLECT THE FRUSTRATIONS THE SOVIETS ARE EXPERIENCING NOW IN SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THEM (E.G., THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE HORN OF AFRICA).

9. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH OUR SOURCE HAS AN OBVIOUS BIAS, IT SEEMS THAT ONCE AGAIN SOVIETS PROVED TO BE THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES. THEIR TOUGHNESS ON NEUTRON BOMB MATCHES OTHER EVIDENCE OF MOSCOW'S DETERMINATION TO PURSUE THIS ISSUE VIGOROUSLY.

10. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE SOVIETS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE ITALIANS MIGHT RESPOND TO SOVIET IMPORTUNING THAT THEY LESSEN THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE ALLIANCE. DURING FOREIGN MINISTER FORLANI'S VISIT LAST JANUARY, HIS SOVIET INTERLOCUTORS MADE A DISTINCT EFFORT TO INDUCE HIM TO SOFTEN THE NATO REJECTION OF
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THE BUCHAREST PROPOSALS (NON-FIRST USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND NO NEW MEMBERS IN NATO AND THE WP). IT MAY BE THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE TAKEN THIS LINE WITH THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS IN PREPARATION FOR THE FORTHCOMING VISIT OF GROMYKO TO ROME WHICH

THE ITALIAN POLITICAL COUNSELOR EXPECTED WOULD TAKE PLACE
EARLY IN 1978. WHAT SEEMS TO HAVE CHANGED IS NOT THE ATTEMPT
TO SPLIT ITALY FROM ITS ALLIES BUT RATHER A CHOICE OF ISSUES ON
WHICH TO PRESS THE ITALIANS. WHILE THE CHIEF THRUST CONTINUES
TO BE DISARMAMENT ISSUES, THE NEUTRON BOMB AND MILITARY BUDGET
QUESTIONS SEEM TO BE THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE SOVIET EFFORTS
THIS TIME.
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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MOSCOW17426
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770448-0461
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Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Oct-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 113186
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS TURNED OFF BY SOVIETS SUMMARY: SOVIET HOSTS TO VISITING ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS, INCLUDING GROMYKO (WHO APPEARED PHYSICALLY FIT), W
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To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5bf5cefb-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009